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RURAL YOUTH AND FIRE PROTECTION

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"On the Alert; Always Learn and Earn; Save and Serve"

An activity in which farm youth can contribute to the defense of rural America in a way all too frequently overlooked is assisting in the safeguarding of all farm buildings, fields, and woodlands against fires. The alertness, sharp eyes, and agility of youth are attributes of utmost importance to fire prevention and control. Young folk are able to inspect places for fire hazards often not accessible to adults and can more readily ferret out hazards once they are recognized. Also, young folk may serve admirably as fire patrols and can quickly spread any fire alarms necessary.

Everyone Suffers as the Result of Fires

The seriousness of fires to farmers is appreciated more fully when we know that approximately 3,500 lives are lost each year through fires on farms and in rural communities of the United States. This number is larger than the total of lives lost at Pearl Harbor on December 7. We will always remember Pearl Harbor. This rural loss is about one-third of the total national loss of lives due to fires. In addition, three times this many rural people are injured annually because of these same fires.

The annual rural property loss by fire totals \$225,000,000 - enough to pay for the building of at least six modern warships - and is 65 percent of the entire national fire loss. The farm portion of this loss is equivalent to a hidden tax of \$16 per farm. The average daily fire loss is \$600,000, enough to build two flying fortresses.

Food and Fiber Must be Conserved

Then there are the forest fires, which do more than \$37,000,000 worth of damage annually. Most of these fires are man-caused, and so could be reduced and probably eliminated.

No other nation is as prosperous as is our United States, yet no other people are more indifferent or neglectful in the matter of fire prevention. In certain countries a fire caused from carelessness is definitely a crime and punishable by fines or imprisonment, or both. All possible food and fiber is needed for the war effort, and it is not enough that even if burned they might be covered by insurance. The materials themselves are urgently needed to win the war.

Food Will Win the War and Write the Peace

Fire losses increase our living costs, directly or indirectly. A hidden tax of \$16 per farmer has been mentioned. A fire is a community as well as a personal disaster. To some farmers it means the wiping out of all they have accumulated in a lifetime. Sabotage may increase the loss by fires in time of war. Many buildings destroyed now may not be replaced until after the war is over.

The following list shows the causes of fires of concern to rural America and indicates where effort to combat such fires should be applied:

<u>Farm-Fire Causes (4)</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Forest-Fire Causes (7)</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Defective chimneys and flues.....	14-1/2	Incendiary.....	26
Lightning.....	10	Smoking.....	24
Sparks on roof.....	8	Debris burning.....	15
Gasoline and other petroleum products.	7-1/2	Lightning.....	12
Matches and smoking.....	6	Railroads.....	4
Spontaneous ignition.....	5	Campers.....	6
Stoves, furnaces, and their pipes	4	Lumbering.....	2
Hot ashes and coals.....	2	Miscellaneous.....	8
Miscellaneous and unknown.....	43	Unknown.....	3
Total	100		100

Losses from fire that might occur during this war effort are more serious than at any other time. Every fire aids the enemy and delays our victory. Fires play into the hands of the enemy, who would like to see our country burn. We can and must prevent and reduce fires. Rural youth can play an important part in protecting farm and rural communities against fire.

What Can Be Done To Help Our Country?

This is how rural youth can help!

Fire prevention and control is one of the major activities to be carried on through the neighborhood leadership plan. All rural youth, whether 4-H Club members, Future Farmers of America, rural Boy Scouts, etc., can find opportunity through this leadership to participate in some fire prevention and control activities. Some of the jobs they might undertake are to:

1. Develop systems for patrolling farm and rural areas and to be especially active in critical areas and seasons.
2. Learn to identify all types of fire hazards and take all possible steps to remove them.
3. Conduct annual farm fire-hazard inspections, make suggestions, and assist in the removal of these hazards.
4. Conduct a fire-fighting equipment survey, assist in placing all equipment in tip-top shape, and provide designated marked places for keeping equipment readily available.

5. Become proficient in the handling of fire-fighting equipment and tools (water containers, shovels, axes, burlap, hose, fire extinguishers, etc.)
6. Study first-aid and safety measures, be prepared to aid the distressed and know how to rescue a victim from a fire.
7. Develop a communication system of telephones, signals, etc., to warn farmers of critical periods and also to spread fire alarms. It is essential to obtain automobile license numbers of cars leaving scenes of fires.
8. Carry on educational programs in rural schools, among farm organizations, for the radio and press, to sponsor essay writing, prepare talks, give demonstrations, set up fair exhibits, show fire pictures to audiences, etc.
9. Cooperate with and assist any farm fire-fighting units and study fire-fighting methods.
10. Provide a messenger service and make available water and lunches for fire fighters.
11. Appraise the farm water system, prevent its contamination, and suggest where water supplies should be kept for fighting fires.
12. Become familiar with local, county, State, and Federal laws and regulations concerning fire prevention and control, sabotage, etc.

Everyone is Expected To Contribute to Our War Effort

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As the neighborhood leader plan develops, a farm fire-control project would offer a specific job for rural youth. To the leader selected is left the procedure for the organization and outlining of local activities recommended in the rural fire-control program of the Agricultural Extension Service. After preliminary instructions, each individual of the organization should start a clean-up campaign for fire-hazard removal on his own farm, and in his own home. For satisfactory results a certificate of proficiency may be issued. (Here, too, is an opportunity to inventory salvageable metal materials needed for the war effort.) Fire hazards and disposable inflammable material should be removed and burned under controlled conditions at selected places and at proper times, and in accordance with the State fire laws.

What Other States Are Doing

New Hampshire has a Junior Farm and Forest Fire-Control Program divided into: (a) The 4-H Fire Rangers for youth 10 to 15 years of age, and (b) the Junior Fire Fighters for youth 15 to 21 years of age.

The California Extension Service has been active since World War I in farm fire-protection work, and work with rural youth has been an important part of the activity.

In Michigan a fire safety contest is being sponsored among the 4-H Clubs. Reports of the contestants are to be judged as follows: Hazard inspection, 30 percent; fire-prevention recommendations, 30 percent; essay, 30 percent; personal activity statement filed with the essay, 10 percent.

In Alabama the 4-H Clubs have cooperated in the construction and placement of 3,063 highway signs on fire prevention and control. In addition, they circulate fire-prevention agreements to be signed by anyone who promises not to set fires and to help extinguish any fire that may have started. In one county 12,000 signatures were obtained by 4-H members.

One year 16,000 4-H girls and boys of Oregon enrolled in a fire-prevention campaign, and a marked reduction in farm fire losses was the result. A thousand Nevada 4-H members participated in a farm fire-hazard survey involving everything from basement to attic and from kitchen stove to rubbish piles.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING FARM FIRE HAZARDS: (For 4-H Club use select only those which apply locally)

I. Defective chimneys and flues:

- a. Build of suitable materials.
- b. Lay bricks on side rather than on edge.
- c. Support chimneys directly on foundations on firm earth.
- d. Insulate wooden part of building from chimney.
- e. Use thick chimney walls.
- f. Eliminate all cracks and unnecessary openings in flues.
- g. Have as few as possible, preferably only one, pipe openings into each flue.
- h. Replace badly rusted pipes.
- i. Have top of chimney at least 2 feet above highest part of roof.
- j. Provide access to attic for inspection.

II. Lightning:

- a. Ground radio aerials, metal roofs, roof gutters and downspouts, metal water tanks, and other similar apparatus.
- b. Keep grounds on lightning rods and other equipment in good condition.
- c. Locate radio aerials on poles away from buildings.

III. Sparks on roofs:

- a. Keep buildings separated far enough so that sparks from one burning building will not set fire to roof of another building.
- b. Use spark screens on chimneys.
- c. Use roofs that do not catch fire readily.

IV. Gasoline and other petroleum products:

- a. Store gasoline and kerosene at least 75 feet from buildings or under ground.
- b. Ground metal containers to moist earth.
- c. Do not smoke or allow smoking near storage.
- d. Do not build or allow fires near storage.

V. Matches and smoking:

- a. Keep matches in metal containers out of reach of small children.
- b. Handle matches carefully.
- c. Put out all matches after they are used.
- d. Do not leave matches in pockets.
- e. Carry only safety matches around farm buildings.
- f. Do not smoke or allow smoking where there is danger of fire.

VI. Spontaneous ignition:

- a. Keep oily rags only in tight metal containers.
- b. Cure hay well before storing it.
- c. Do not allow horse manure to accumulate in or against buildings.
- d. Repair leaks in roofs promptly.
- e. Ventilate hay after storage.

VII. Stoves, furnaces, and their pipes:

- a. Avoid overheating.
- b. Keep stoves and furnaces in good repair.
- c. Keep areas around all heaters clean and free from trash.
- d. Protect floors under stoves with a fireproof covering.
- e. Repair doors that do not close properly.
- f. Do not place wood boxes too close to stoves.
- g. Keep stovepipes in good repair.
- h. Do not place wood, lumber, etc., on furnaces or stoves.
- i. Insulate pipes where they pass through floors and ceilings.

VIII. Hot ashes and coals, including open fires:

- a. Handle all ashes and coals safely.
- b. Remove ashes and coals from heaters in fireproof containers.
- c. Place all ashes and coals in fireproof containers.
- d. Use fire screens in front of fireplaces and open grates.

IX. Lights and lighting systems:

- a. Handle all kerosene and gasoline lamps and lanterns carefully.
- b. Provide and use hooks for hanging lanterns at safe locations in barns.
- c. Fill lamps and lanterns in daylight.
- d. Be sure all electric wiring is installed in accord with the National Electrical Code.

IX. Lights and lighting systems: (Continued)

- e. Keep all electric wiring in good repair.
- f. Avoid knotting electric cords.
- g. Do not use extension cords where permanent wiring should be installed.
- h. Do not connect appliances or other electrical machinery to drop cord light outlets.
- i. Keep electric wiring and equipment free from dust, dirt, and cobwebs.

X. Power machinery:

- a. Keep steam engines at least 50 feet from buildings, haystacks, etc.
- b. Use spark arresters on steam engines.
- c. Keep the ground around all engines free from inflammable material.
- d. Do not use an engine too near hay, fuel, etc.
- e. Do not use tractors in the barn.
- f. Do not use tractors near buildings unless they have good mufflers.
- g. Provide good foundations for gasoline or kerosene engines in separate buildings away from fuel storage.
- h. Use dust-tight motors on fans in dusty locations.
- i. Ground all stationary machines.

XI. Incubators and brooders:

- a. Use in separate buildings away from other buildings.
- b. Keep litter away from fire or heating element.
- c. Keep equipment in good condition.

XII. Bonfires and burning trash:

- a. Keep under control.
- b. Always watch them carefully until they have gone out.
- c. Keep away from buildings and other material which may burn.
- d. Do not burn on windy days.
- e. Soak remaining ashes with water before leaving a fire.

XIII. Farm woodlands, shelterbelts, and windbreaks:

- a. Remove inflammable material such as dry brush, grass, and weeds bordering woodlands, shelterbelts, and windbreaks and provide firebreaks by clearing, plowing, etc.
- b. Prevent smoking and guard against locomotive sparks. Post "no smoking" signs. Ask proper authorities to see that locomotives passing nearby have spark arresters if they are needed.
- c. Attend slash fires, bonfires, etc., at all times.
- d. Cut down tall dead trees that may be struck by lightning.
- e. Bury exposed pieces of glass.

XIV. Fire-fighting equipment:

- a. Keep at least 2 barrels of water available.
- b. If a fire engine is available, keep at least 3,000 gallons of water available in a cistern, stream, pond, or reservoir.
- c. Keep water buckets available.
- d. Do not depend entirely on the farm water system.
- e. Keep the garden hose available.
- f. Keep sand available.
- g. Keep an axe available.
- h. Keep hoes, shovels, and rakes available.
- i. Keep a ladder which will reach the roof of every building available.
- j. Keep a ladder for climbing all roofs available.
- k. Keep fire extinguishers filled and in good condition.

References

(Note: References are those consulted in preparing this article. They are not cited for availability. State extension publications should be requested from States issuing them.)

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